

Amazonian Tribes Found Whose Myths Parallel Bible Tales

Traditions Brought From South America by Dr. Farrabee Bear Striking Similarity to Stories of Lot's Wife, Tree of Calamity in Garden of Eden and the Deluge—Peculiar Marriage Laws and Customs of Natives

By HENRY J. BUXTON.

COLORFUL myths which in many instances strikingly parallel the story of the origin of man as contained in Genesis were unearthed among lost tribes in the Amazon region by Dr. William C. Farrabee, noted ethnologist and South American explorer, who recently made public some of his discoveries.

One of these tribes, the Wapishana, hold that the Creator is Tuminkar, a superman, who lived on the earth before the coming of man and animals and who lived with man and men for a long time afterward, teaching them how to hunt and fish and live properly.

In the death of Tuminkar's son at the hands of a giant, who personifies wickedness, the myth reveals a decided New Testament flavor. The son is buried beneath a flat rock, but is soon resurrected from the dead. Quickly, however, his spirit leaves the body again and for the second time the body is placed beneath the rock. Tuminkar departs for his abode in the skies after telling the Wapishanas that when the rock has worn away his son will come forth as a redeemer and be their teacher and leader. So the Wapishanas look eagerly for the second coming of Tuminkar's son, just as the Christian world looks for the second coming of Christ, the Son of God. The traditions of this tribe include one dealing with a great flood or

dilution penetrated the region, but in one corner of the great savannah the ethnologist found an Episcopal mission, and was much astonished to enter the church and hear a choir of girls clothed only in small beaded aprons singing familiar tunes to native words.

Dr. Farrabee's book describes in detail the life of the tribes, their culture, their language and their traditions. His work has added an amazing chapter to matters ethnological.

Legend of Wapishanas.

"The Creator of the Wapishanas," writes Dr. Farrabee, "is not an all powerful spirit, with supernatural powers, but a superman who lived on the earth before the advent of men and animals and who continued to live with man and men for a long time thereafter."

"He went hunting with his brother, who was caught by a monster over whom he had no control. He kept dogs for hunting purposes and used the blowgun and poisoned arrows to shoot birds and monkeys. He had no definite powers over animals or inanimate subjects. He had no spiritual power, and is not now thought of as a spirit. He does not possess any of the attributes of a god. He is one who lived on the earth a long time ago, who went away and is now living in the sky, where he will continue to live, not as a spirit but in the body. It is not a place for departed spirits. They have no place to go, but remain

to it, and no methods are taken to keep it away. If one dreams of a dead man it is because his *durima* is near. Dreams are spoken of as real experiences, but they distinguish between them and their waking experiences."

Tuminkar's Life Story.

The story of the life of Tuminkar, the superman on earth, is chronicled by Doctor Farrabee as follows:

"A long time ago there lived on earth a great giant named Baukur, who went about killing and injuring people until finally Tuminkar remonstrated with him. As a result, war was declared and waged for a long time with fearful loss."

"One of Baukur's arrows struck and killed the son of Tuminkar, which made Tuminkar so angry that he drove Baukur away from the earth and bound him fast in the sky so he can never return. He can be seen to-day, the constellation of Orion, and he continues to shoot his arrows from the sky in the form of meteors. Tuminkar fought with thunder and lightning as his weapons."

"After Tuminkar's son was killed his body was first buried under the rock Maridiku, where it remained only a few days and then came to life again. The people were very sad and followed him weeping as he went around Mount Karawaimin, where Tuminkar in vexation stamped upon the great flat rock takni, which immediately opened. Then Tuminkar laid the body of his son at the bottom of



CAPT. WILLIAM C. FARRABEE.

"The Wapishanas have no tradition of the creation of the world, but start with a world ready made, composed of land and water, air and sky, as they are at present. There were the two deities, Tuminkar and Duid, who were brothers living on the earth. The elder brother, Tuminkar, was the benevolent creator, who made and taught the people all things while he was yet on earth. The younger brother was the companion and assistant of the creator. Men and women were created before animals were made, but they did not know of what man was made."

Creation of Animals.

The story of the creation of animals is as picturesque and imaginative as anything found in the *Sanskrit*, the ancient language of the Hindus. It follows, as penned by Dr. Farrabee:

"The animals were made of clay in the desired form and size and then painted. After this the animal was allowed to select for himself where he should live, what his food should be and what call or song he should have. The people stood by watching the process with eager interest. The first animal was the jaguar, *bidikur*. After he was completed and his spots had been put on, Tuminkar asked him where he would live, what he would eat and what sound he should make. He looked about and seeing nothing but trees and people, said: 'I think I should prefer to live on the ground, roam and frighten the people and eat them.' He was allowed his choice."

"At present there is no way of getting wisdom. There is no communion with Tuminkar, who is still living above, knows their wants, will do them good, but they do not call upon him for assistance except in case of sickness. The common people never address him in any fashion. Their ignorance and helplessness must continue until the coming of the redeemer, who will live among them and teach them the ways of life."

He, too, was given his choice. The third animal was the tapir, *kudul*. While Tuminkar was making him, the monkey climbed down on a low branch to watch the operation and became very anxious about it when he saw what a large animal was being constructed. He said to himself: 'Now that fellow ought to live on the ground, but I can see very well that he will not want to do so because there will not be enough for both him and the jaguar to eat; I am afraid he will want to come up here and it will not do, for he is so big he would break the trees down and it would be dangerous for both of us.'

"So he climbed down very near to the tapir and when Tuminkar asked him about where he would live the monkey whispered in his ear: 'Don't say anything. You cannot come up here, and there will not be enough on the ground for you to eat, so don't say anything at all.' When the tapir did not answer Tuminkar repeated the questions and the monkey whispered again: 'Do not answer.' Then Tuminkar said to the tapir: 'You are such an awfully stupid fellow you have no use for a voice. Go away and secure your living wherever you can and eat whatever you can get.' Hence he has no call, and though he lives on the ground he eats of the leaves of the trees which he pulls down with his long nose."

The Tree of Disaster.

As the tree in the Garden of Eden brought calamity to Adam and Eve, so did the Tree of Life of the Wapishanas bring disaster to their race. It brought on a flood which inundated the earth with the exception of the mountains of three-peaks.

"After Tuminkar had made men," writes Dr. Farrabee, "it was the duty of Duid to provide food for them, which he did in abundance. Every day he brought fresh food in great

variety and profusion and gave it freely to the people, who were grateful, and rendered him thanks for his goodness. Having nothing to do, the people amused themselves by watching the animals going out every morning in the same direction and returning well fed in the evening. So they said among themselves: 'We have nothing to do; let us go along with the animals and see where they go and what they do.'

"After they had followed for a long distance they came to a great tree bearing all kinds of fruit and vegetables. The ground was covered and there was plenty for all the animals. They said among themselves: 'This is where Duid gets food for us every day; let us come for it ourselves; we

Traces Discovered of an Earlier Race Whose History Is Lost—Fable of Warlike Women of Huge Stature Is Shattered

industrious these would have been found in great abundance. Moreover, to this day it is necessary to work hard in order to make the cassava grow."

"The stump of the tree is pointed out to this day—a steep granite rock standing up fifty feet or more out of the plain. It is known as *Awayaplapu* Mountain and is located in the region of the group of sacred mountains. The name is the same as that for the silk-cotton tree (*Bombax ceiba*), and this tree is also spoken of as the tree from which Duid got the food."

"When Tuminkar had the tree cut down the waters of the tree burst forth in a tremendous flood, which gradually rose and covered the face of the whole earth except *Serriri*, a three-peaked mountain, the highest in the region, located about forty miles northward between the Rupununi and Takutu rivers. When the waters began to rise some of the people, in order to prevent the extinction of the race, caught a 'bai' or wild muscovy duck (*Cairina moschata*), cut off his upper mandible, which they used as a canoe, and floated to the top of the mountain."

"After twenty days the waters began to subside. The survivors were very hungry and wondered how soon the land would again appear, so they threw off rocks toward the north to determine the depth of the water and thus the small round-top mountain nearby was built up."

Origin of Fire.

Dr. Farrabee chronicles the Tuminkar myth of the origin of fire.

"*Ajejeke* and *Duid* lived in separate houses after the woman came, but they were near together in the same clearing. They had always eaten their food raw, but they noticed the woman ate nothing raw except fruit and decided she must have some secret because she always ate alone. They tried to persuade her to tell them where fire came from and how it was made, but she declined to do so. Many years afterward, when she was an old woman and had many children, *Ajejeke* said to her: 'Bring them here, up closer to me.' She did so and he seized her and forced her to give up the secret. Now that they had fire, all nature wanted it and it was given to Duid as his special duty to guard and protect it."

"The Mapidians, Dr. Farrabee says, live further in the interior, surrounded by tribes of Carib stock among whom they are intermarrying and from whom they are receiving new elements of culture. They claim relationship with the *Ataroi*, but speak their own language, which is a dialect of *Arawak* resembling the *Ataroi*.

Dr. Farrabee tells of the finding of queer petroglyphs along the rivers on the smooth surface of granite rocks in exposed places open to view from the river. The designs are in form of men, animals, fish, serpents, or they may be purely geometric figures. The Indians living in the regions where they occur know nothing of their origin or significance and have no traditions or beliefs regarding them. This, Dr. Farrabee declares, is good evidence that they were made by a former people and are of very great age."

Dr. Farrabee points out that the people of all the tribes he visited were wonderfully healthy and exceedingly clean in their habits of living. "Men and women," he says, "are well developed, but neither fat nor muscular. Both have great endurance and pack heavy loads for long distances without apparent fatigue. All are scrupulously clean in their habits of life. Among the Mapidians men, women and children all bathe together. It is the custom among the tribes to bathe twice a day. They keep their dogs and houses clean also."

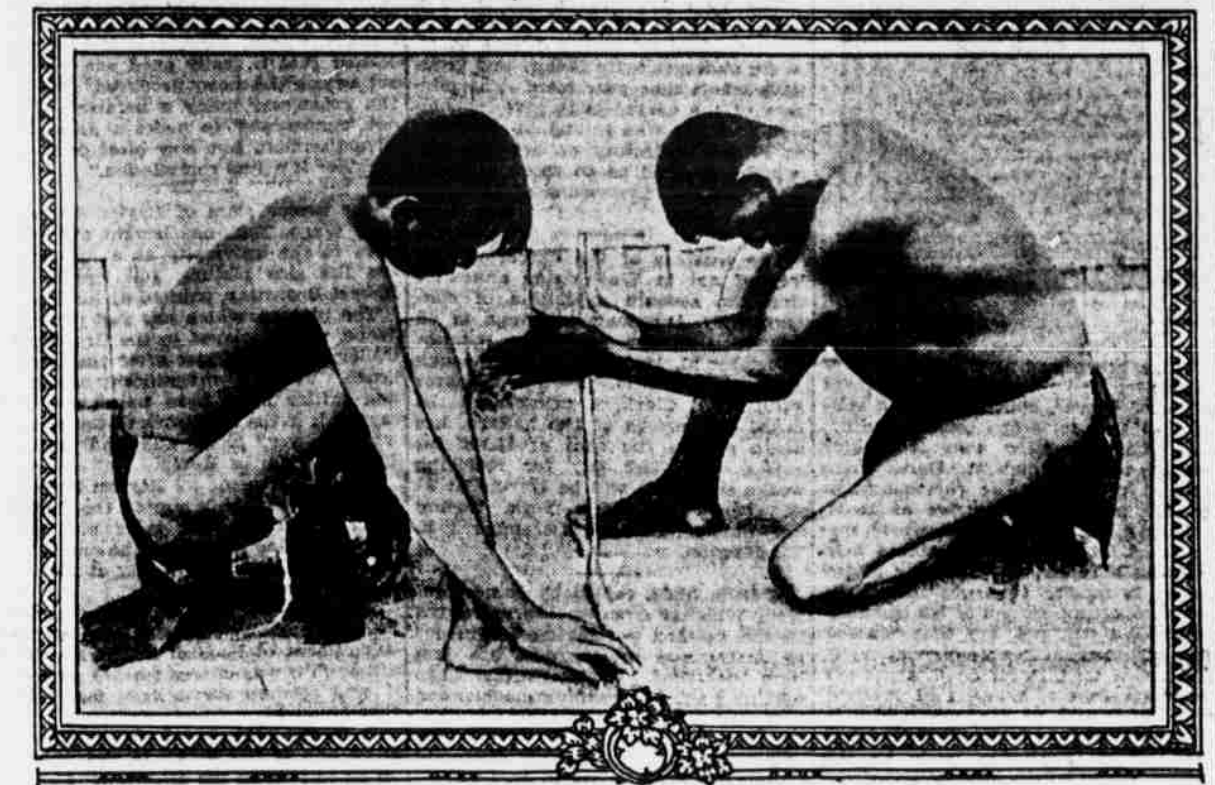
"With the Wapishanas marriage takes place soon after the girl reaches puberty. There is no ceremony whatever and no formal announcement of either engagement or marriage. The first evidence of marriage is given when a woman goes with a man and follows his trail. They are never seen together without companions, because they are married. They decide the matter themselves without consultation with any one. The boy does not even ask the consent of the girl's father, but custom requires him to work for his father-in-law for a time after he is married or give him an equivalent."

Two Wives for Each Man.

"Men are allowed to have two wives and in truth most of them do, thanks to the curious fact that there are many more women than men in the tribe. When the first child is born the wife tells her husband that he should take another wife because there is so much work to be done in the field must be cultivated, cotton spun, hammocks and clothing made. His wife may advise him which to take, her younger sister or her cousin, saying that they would get along well together. The first wife is the master of the household and usually does less of the outdoor work. She assumes the care of both sets of children and governs the household so successfully that they grow up as one family."

"It is remarkable that there is so little evidence of jealousy between the wives of the same husband, or rather that the husband is so successful in the management of his household that there is no cause for jealousy."

"In the twenty-five years Mr. Melville has been intimately acquainted with the tribe he had heard of but two cases of women committing suicide by hanging because of the hus-



WAPISHANA BOYS MAKING FIRE.

deluge which covered all the earth with the exception of a three peaked mountain. The Noah in this instance was a resourceful man, who cut off the upper mandible of a great muscovy duck, which he used as a canoe to float himself and a few of his people to the security of the mountain top. So strong is this tradition implanted in this particular tribe that the duck's bill is frequently used today as a spoon or worn suspended from a necklace or an amulet."

There are a pair of Adams instead of one in the story of creation of the *Turuma* tribe. The names of these exceedingly lonely first men were *Ajejeke* and *Duid*. Though they had the advantage of each other's companionship they hungered for that indefinable missing something—woman. But pause—this is not a rib story. If it had been the chances are that *Ajejeke* and *Duid* would have had to draw lots to see which would contribute the rib for the creation of the first woman. Instead this is a fish story. In other words, somebody tipped off the brothers that woman lived at the bottom of a great pool and that they must fish for her. They did fish, and like a great many fishermen they were not on the level with each other. One of the brothers while the other slept sneaked to the pool and dropped in his hook, line and sinker, and after much angling caught the woman."

There is also a tree of life in the religious traditions of these tribes, and a myth which is surprisingly like the Bible story of Lot's wife, who looked backward at the destroyed cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and was turned to salt. The difference is that three women figure in the South American tribal myth, and because they could not control their curiosity and looked they were turned to stone."

Dr. Farrabee's Discoveries.

Coincident with the return of Dr. Farrabee from his labor as ethnographer of the American Peace Commission to resume his work at the University of Pennsylvania Museum that institution has published the first volume of his report on his Amazon expedition, which covered a period of three years.

The report is issued under the title "The Central Arawaks." They are found in northern Brazil and southern British Guiana within a broad savannah some 20,000 to 30,000 square miles in extent, reaching from near the Venezuelan boundary to the western banks of the Essequibo River and from the Amazon forests to the foot of the Pakaraima mountains; or from 55.1 degrees to 63 degrees west longitude and 1 1/2 to 4 1/2 degrees north latitude.

Originally the various tribes of this central related group must have been parts of a great nation. The Wapishanas, recent invaders of the territory, absorbed the *Ataroi*, and other tribes moved down, changing their habitat, some of them becoming extinct, others leaving the savannahs and becoming forest dwellers. The present volume deals principally with the Wapishanas, the largest of these tribes, taken as typical of the inhabitants of the region. A man until Dr. Farrabee's ex-

about the old home for a time. When a man dies, his body is buried in the house and the family moves away to avoid being molested by the spirit, which continues about the place. "There is no other life or existence for the body or the spirit; hence there can be no rewards nor punishments for good or evil deeds done in the body. Whatever religion they may be said to practice has no reference to moral teaching. All the good that comes to a man is through his own efforts, and only evil is sent upon him. Hence it is that medicine men are employed to discover the source of evil."

"Tuminkar, the superman, is indifferent and inactive, hence no offerings, prayer or supplications are addressed to him by the common people. The medicine man, however, calls upon him in his incantations to drive away sickness and the rain cloud."

"Every man has something in him they call a *durima*, which leaves the body at death and continues to live near by, but there is no place where *durimas* go or remain. The people have some fear of the return of the *durima*. A mother's *durima*, for instance, might return and take away her children. No offerings are made

the cleft and the rock closed again over the body. The son had no name, but was called Tuminkardjan—the son of Tuminkar."

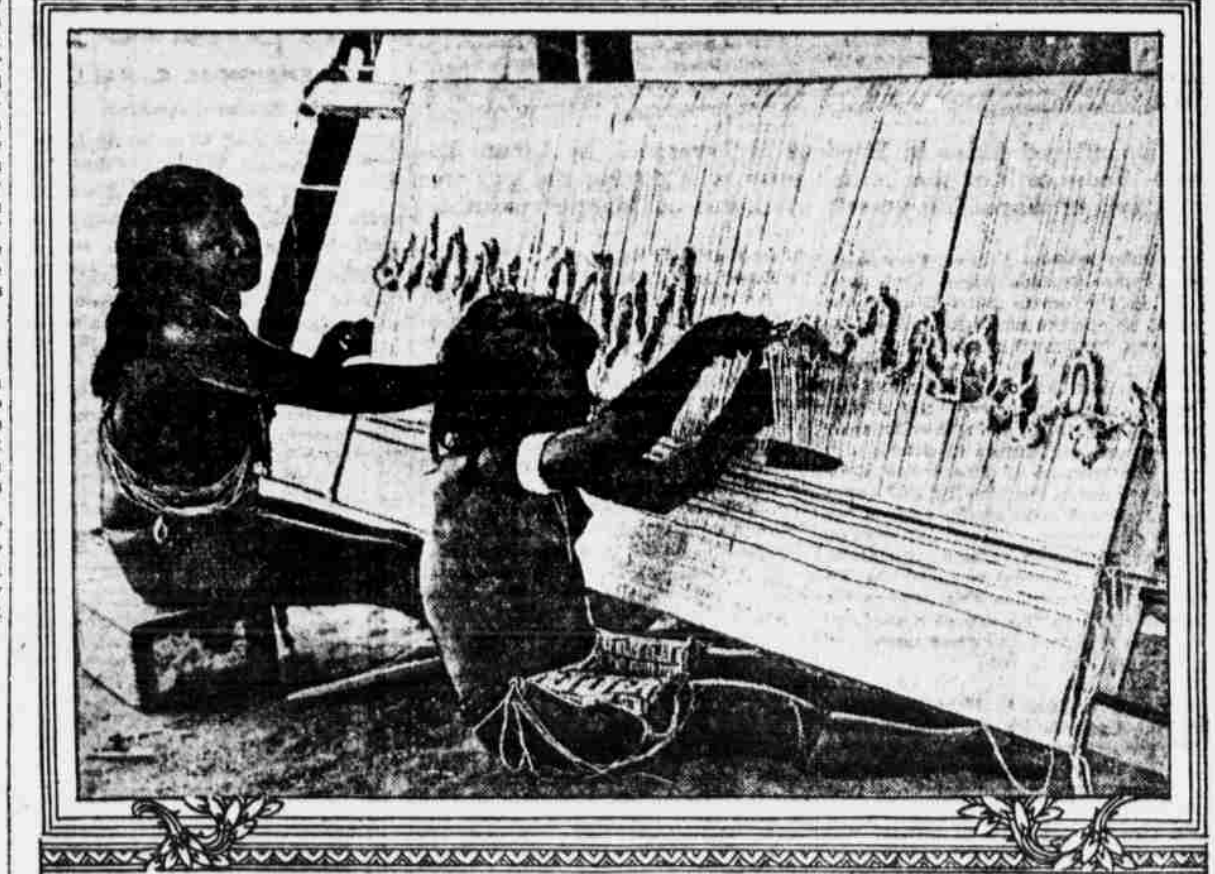
"After the death of his son Tuminkar left the earth and went to live above. Before leaving he told the people that when the rock had worn away his son would come forth and be their leader and teacher. The rock is nearly gone and they are continually expecting him. In the beginning Tuminkar told them everything; how to live, how to make and do all things, but they have forgotten much of his teaching. When Tuminkardjan returns to live among them they will learn everything anew."

No Communion With Him Now.

"At present there is no way of getting wisdom. There is no communion with Tuminkar, who is still living above, knows their wants, will do them good, but they do not call upon him for assistance except in case of sickness. The common people never address him in any fashion. Their ignorance and helplessness must continue until the coming of the redeemer, who will live among them and teach them the ways of life."



VIEW OF A MAPIDIAN HOUSE and the FAMILY THEREOF



WAPISHANA WOMEN WEAVING A HAMMOCK.

have nothing else to do; then we shall not have to thank him for it. We will get what we want and just when we want it."

"They all agreed to it and went to Duid and told him that he need not bring them food any more; that they knew where he got it and that they would go for it themselves. Duid was very angry and said: 'Very well, it shall be as you wish; henceforth you will have to work to obtain food to eat. To-morrow the tree will be cut down and it will die and there will be no more food for you to savor. However, I will tell you this: If you will break off a branch of each kind of fruit or vegetable you like, plant it in the ground, water and cultivate and protect it, it will grow and bear fruit in its season and each after its kind. Then you may plant the seeds that are in the fruit and they will grow again and produce, each after its kind.'

"Thus you may continue to eat the fruit of the tree, but you will be required to work very hard for it."

"The day following the tree was cut down as Duid had said. The people selected a certain number of fruits and vegetables and planted them, but it was so much labor and trouble to care for them that they saved only a few of the great number. They did not like to work so hard. They experimented with the ones they liked best and kept only the ones they liked best. Consequently there are to-day not many kinds of edible plants in the world, whereas if they had been more

"The story of the origin of the race," says Dr. Farrabee, "is an interesting variant of the *Turuma* story in which two brothers went fishing with hooks from the jawbone of the paca, and Duid caught the woman while Tuminkar slept."

Their First Sight of White Men.

"Not one of the Mapidians had ever seen a white man before, yet they showed no anxiety, nervousness or special interest in us personally. They were greatly interested in all our equipment and the trading material we carried."

Dr. Farrabee's explorations have set aside for all time the fable of a race of warlike women of huge stature living in the Amazon region. In reference to this he says:

"On our way up the Takutu we heard many times of a tribe of women living at the head of the river on the British side. Later we learned from John Ogilvie that some ten Wapishana women live together in a large house they have built for themselves on Sand Creek. They are elderly women whose husbands are dead and whose accounts of the savannah tribes, this condition seems due to changed economic conditions and introduced diseases. Several tribes have totally disappeared within the last hundred years. The Wapishanas number about 1,200; the *Ataroi*, including half-bloods, less than 100; the *Turuma* about 50 and the Mapidians less than 100."

hand's favoritism for the other wife. In one case the woman killed her three children by the same means."

Divorce is easily arranged, according to Dr. Farrabee.

"There is no separation ceremony," he says. "But husband and wife may desert the other at will without fear of punishment. But separations seldom occur, for the reason that there are few family troubles of any kind."

"When a child is born the father takes to his hammock and keeps it for a month. He must not go out in the hot sun or do any manual labor whatever. He must not eat any strong or solid foods. His wife and other women bring him the most delicate foods. They think there is some mysterious physical relation existing between father and child and that it would harm the child just as much for the mother to eat coarse foods as for the child to eat them itself. He must not kill any vicious animals or poisonous snakes for a period of two years."

"The total population of these four Arawak tribes is less than 1,500 and rapidly decreasing. According to some accounts of the savannah tribes, this condition seems due to changed economic conditions and introduced diseases. Several tribes have totally disappeared within the last hundred years. The Wapishanas number about 1,200; the *Ataroi*, including half-bloods, less than 100; the *Turuma* about 50 and the Mapidians less than 100."